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Defector was top official in international agency

By William Matthews
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An East German nuclear scientist who defected to West Germany last week was "a top echelon" official for the International Atomic Energy Agency, an official of the agency said yesterday in New York.

Peter Adler, 42, was a section head in the agency's technical assistance program and had been an East German representative in the IAEA since early 1979, said Marlene O'Dell, an IAEA liaison officer stationed at the United Nations. A U.S. government agency that is keeping tabs on the defection described him as "a senior science adviser."

The West German government confirmed Mr. Adler's defection yesterday.

A West German newspaper, Die Welt, reported that Mr. Adler and his wife and 11-year-old son traveled from Vienna, Austria, where the International Atomic Energy Agency is headquartered, to West Germany to seek political asylum.

The newspaper called Mr. Adler a leading East German nuclear scientist. Die Bilt newspaper reported that Mr. Adler defected to the West for political reasons and to keep East German authorities from forcing his son to leave an Austrian school and attend school in East Germany. Mr. Adler's wife reportedly was a secretary at the East German embassy in Vienna.

In Vienna, a spokesman at IAEA told Deutsche Presse-Agentur that Mr. Adler had "an important but not political post" as an administrator heading an advisory body for acquiring equipment in the

agency's main department for technical aid. The spokesman said Mr. Adler was regarded as a conscientious administrator with wide specialist knowledge.

The IAEA's main job is to monitor nuclear power plants, research reactors and other civilian nuclear installations to assure that they aren't being used to produce nuclear weapons.

According to the IAEA spokesman, Mr. Adler's activities had nothing to do with the agency's role in supervising the peaceful use of atomic energy.

Officials at the State Department said they were aware of Mr. Adler's defection but declined to comment on its significance.

Miss O'Dell described Mr. Adler as a member of "the very top echelon" of IAEA employees. She said his job involved helping developing countries

prepare to use nuclear technology in power plants, medicine, agriculture and industry. The agency provides technical experts, training and equipment for developing countries that want to make peaceful use of nuclear energy.

There are 112 member countries in the IAEA, and representatives from each country work for the agency. East Germany had five representatives there, Miss O'Dell said.

Records at the United Nations show East Germany has five nuclear reactors for generating electricity, five others for research and one unspecified "nuclear facility," she said.

Miss O'Dell said news of Mr. Adler's defection had not reached the IAEA office at the United Nations by yesterday afternoon. "We haven't heard a thing about it, but we're not involved in personnel," she said.